How many people in this room are stressed right now? About life? If you will ever get tickets to Hamilton? What happens after graduation? I strongly believe that the best way to deal with stress is with laughter. So don’t worry, I went out and became a trained laughter therapist to help y’all out! I know this is unconventional but I’m going to do a little laughter exercise with you, because if my speech doesn’t inspire you, at least we can all leave this auditorium knowing we laughed once today.

~lead laughter exercise takes about 3min~

Thank you! That was great, you’ll feel the endorphins soon!

Laughter is the most powerful medicine because it keeps us young, and let’s us be children for a little while. And besides why would we ever want to grow up? According to J.M. Barrie, “growing up is such barbarous business, full of inconveniences... and pimples.” When I was ten years old I thought it would be a good idea to pour glitter on my head and jump off my bed. At the time I thought I was going to fly, escape my responsibilities, and most importantly never have to grow up. And that’s exactly what happened, surprise! I’m peter pan! No, I wish, instead I gave the ground a body-five and I learned the hard way that glitter is not pixie dust and takes a lifetime to get out of your hair. More importantly, I learned that gravity exists and it can hurt. I imagine Isaac Newton felt similarly when an apple fell on his head, and he also probably hates glitter.

Why am I telling you all this? Because like many of you, I’m scared of growing up, dealing with change, and stepping out of these doors and becoming a graduate. Unlike Brandeis, the world is not always a kind place. Not many people will keep the door open for you when you are still a mile away from the door. Not many people will come to your improv performance, a cappella show, and your thesis presentation in the same week. Never mind that, nowhere else will you find someone that is in an a cappella, a club sport, has three majors, and writing a thesis at the same time.

Not many people will volunteer their last weeks of summer to be a part of New Student Orientation; help lug refrigerators up to the third floor of Shapiro, Cable, and the Village, stay up until 1am and wake up at 7am just to make New Students feel at home. To prove to the new students that, “this is our house!” In the real world we probably won’t be able to find people in yellow shirts yelling about how excited they are that they get to move us into our apartments. I checked, those people only exist at Brandeis.

Growing up is so difficult because it’s hard to face change. It was really hard when Asia wok burned down; when the castle started collapsing, when the Berlin wall was constructed in lower Usdan. What other class can say that they experienced three different university presidents over the span of four years? What other class can say that we made real changes through FordHall2015, expanded the university’s
diversity, and help establish the Rape Crisis Center to prevent and eventually bring an end to sexual assault? We did that! Not only have we been a part of change, but we also were the ones that created change. And I know this is the most cliché thing to say, but I truly believe we can go out and make changes in the world. It was Nelson Mandela that said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” We have been giving the privilege of attending Brandeis, and it is our duty to do something with that privilege; to make a difference.

We can change our environment in small ways like opening the doors for strangers, or sharing a video of a puppy to make your friend laugh. Or in big ways like changing policies so women have an equal voice, demonstrating that transgender rights are human rights, and that black lives matter. Let’s show the world that Brandeis graduates bleed social justice. As scared as we might be to face the world outside of Brandeis, we are prepared. We’ve made changes at Brandeis and we can do it again. We will take the endless energy of an orientation leader, the endurance of the soccer team, a dash of sass from Marie at the sandwich station, and the genuine compassion that exudes from our community to affect positive change; so that young girls and boys, and non-gender conforming children are no longer scared to grow up.